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RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 3900

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SUBJECT: TIBETAN LANGUAGE INTERNET IN THE PRC

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: The nascent growth of Tibetan language internet in China slowed with the closure of several websites and detention of Tibetan e-activists over the past year. Tibetan language email and websites are nevertheless becoming increasingly popular among students and intellectuals, lower-level government officials, and monks due to much improved language upgrades in Microsoft Vista. Ethnic Tibetans are networking using Tibetan language e-mail, the Internet, telephone software such as Skype, and instant messaging services. Eighty-eight Tibetan language websites, including eleven government-sponsored sites, are currently available in China, mostly in ethnic Tibetan areas outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). Given prior official support voiced by Chinese authorities for the development of Tibetan language software followed by the more recent crackdowns, it appears that Tibetan language internet is viewed by the government as both an avenue to influence Tibetans as well as a potential threat. End Summary.

High Plateau Internet

¶2. (U) The Internet appears to be becoming more popular and accessible for China's six million ethnic Tibetans both within their own traditional areas and in other parts of the country. According to the China Center for Tibet Studies (a PRC government funded Tibetology research center in Beijing that publishes much research in both Chinese and Tibetan), the number of regular net users in the TAR reached 200,000 this year and there are an estimated 800 TAR-hosted websites. (Note: most are in Chinese and aimed at the burgeoning ethnic Han minority there). In 1998, the first-ever internet bar was opened in Lhasa and charged 50 RMB (USD 6) per hour for internet access. Today, Lhasa's approximately 133 internet bars typically charge just 2 RMB (USD 30 cents) per hour.

Improved Language Support Boosts Websites

¶3. (SBU) Chinese language Tibetan websites, such as Tibetcul.com run out of an ethnic Tibetan area of Gansu Province that was suspended for several weeks in March 2009, are not new. However, the rapid improvements in Tibetan language application software for Windows XP as well as Windows Vista are creating a second Tibetan language wave of Tibetan internet use. Ever since Microsoft developed Himalaya Tibetan software with Windows Vista in 2007, many young Tibetan e-activists have been chatting in Tibetan through QQ, Skype and sending Tibetan-language e-mails.

¶4. (SBU) One ethnic Tibetan IT worker told ConGen recently there are now over one hundred Tibetan language websites in the world and 88 of them are hosted in Tibetan areas of China. Among the 88 Tibetan websites, eleven were created for official government purposes, with the others being semi-official or private. According to the IT worker, ninety percent of Tibetan language websites were created in Tibetan areas of China outside of the TAR, especially in Tibetan areas of Qinghai and Gansu Provinces. These Tibetan language websites are owned by non-governmental communities and individuals, such as Tibetan monasteries, college students, and low-ranking rural Tibetan cadres.

PRC Sees Both Opportunity~

¶5. (SBU) Senior Chinese government leaders, including President Hu Jintao, have officially voiced support for making it easier to use Tibetan on computers and the Internet. On January 10, 2009 in Lhasa, the TAR government inaugurated a new Tibetan language software development project. At the opening-ceremony, TAR Governor Shamba Phuntsog asserted, "the development of Tibetan language software and the digitalization of Tibetan is an important part of TAR's stability and development work. This will not only make it easier for Tibetan masses to use modern communication, but also will effectively refute Western hostile forces and the `Dalai clique's proposition that Tibetan culture is dying out in China." (<http://tinyurl.com/ddqk5k>). Official attention given to Tibetan language on the Internet appears to parallel the lengthening of Tibetan language PRC state radio broadcasts from four to eighteen hours daily beginning in March 2009.

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~ and Threat in Tibetan Language Websites

¶6. (SBU) At the same time, however, some Tibetan language websites have been closed and ethnic Tibetan Web activists arrested. For example, Kunga Tsayang, a monk from the Labrang Monastery in Gansu Province, was reportedly arrested by Public Security Bureau officers in a late-night raid on March 17, 2009 during a general government crackdown across Tibetan areas of China. Tsayang had written such online political essays as, "Who Is the Real Disturber of Stability?" and, "Who Is the Real Instigator of Protests?" A translation of one of his articles, "Who are the Real Separatists?" can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/oybjop>

¶7. (SBU) Similarly, on October 16, 2007, a day before the Dalai Lama was due to be honored with the Congressional Gold Medal, www.tibettl.com/blog was shut down temporarily. Soon after, www.tibetcm.com known as "the Lamp" that claimed some 800 registered forum users and blogwww.tibetcm.com/blog were temporarily shut down and only reopened after sensitive articles and postings were deleted. These websites were also suspended for two to three weeks in March 2009, but have since been reopened. The Chinese-language Tibetan website www.newtibet.com has been closed since 2005. Website owners are reportedly often called to police stations and ordered to delete articles.

QQ Tibetan Language Messaging Shutdown

¶8. (SBU) Another indicator of official anxiety over Tibetan language internet was the February 2009 closure of Tibetan language messaging on QQ, which is by far China's most popular internet messaging service. Monitoring Tibetan language messaging is probably difficult for the Chinese government, which reportedly faces shortages of personnel both linguistically capable of reading Tibetan and politically reliable enough to be depended upon to give accurate reports.

¶9. (SBU) Tencent QQ (a Shenzhen company, for background see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QQ>) recently received the following message from an ethnic Tibetan; "Over the past 10 years, QQ has provided high quality services for all the net users and we are very grateful for that. Since the Himalayan Tibetan language support was built into the Microsoft Vista operating system, it has brought an unprecedented benefit for the development and use of Tibetan language on the internet and hence all Tibetans are very happy about this. However, Tencent has recently banned Tibetan language chat on the QQ without any reason. As a great culture in the big family of China, Tibetan should be respected and given equal rights in the society; therefore, we hope that Tencent will solve this problem as soon as possible and give Tibetans equal rights." (The original Chinese language text is at <http://tinyurl.com/cmhwth>)"

¶10. (SBU) The recent Tibetan language chatting ban on QQ indicates the challenges and difficulties Tibetan language users are facing in China. The Chinese Government often suspends or shuts down Tibet-related websites in both the Chinese and Tibetan languages for political reasons, and has detained Tibetan e-activists for writing, posting and chatting sensitive things on the internet. This situation appears to have gotten more serious over the past year, likely due to general security tightening ahead of sensitive Tibetan anniversaries in March. At least six well-known Tibetan e-activists have reportedly been harassed, and their blogs and websites have closed down over the last 10 months (for example: <http://tinyurl.com/cd6qfm> or <http://tinyurl.com/corjkr>).

Hot Topics: Religion, Culture, Literature, Education

¶11. (SBU) Hot topics on Tibetan language websites include:

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religion, culture, literature, the promotion of the Tibetan language, education, government policies, environmental protection, and health care. In addition, some of these websites carry Tibetan language blogs, forums, opinion pollingg, interviews, on-line movies and songs. Most participants appear to be Tibetan students, young intellectuals, and monks, as well as rural/low ranking Tibetan government or Party cadres.

Official Involvement in Software Development

¶12. (U) Chinese government offices involved in developing Tibetan language software include: the Communist Party's United Front Work Department, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the National Reform and Development Commission, and the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Private Chinese companies are also working on such software, including the China Founder Group

and Red Flag Software Company, as well as the Tibet University and the TAR Tibetan Language Working Committee.

Comments

¶13. (SBU) Most Tibetan websites appear to have been created and are managed by young Tibetans as either a part-time job (with little remuneration) or hobby using very simple and basic technology. It does look like anyone is making much of a profit from Tibetan language websites yet. Shortages of funding and Tibetan technical expertise remain obstacles to the further development of Tibetan language websites and e-activism. The future of e-activism and Tibetan language use on the internet in China will likely continue to remain closely tied to the availability of cheap internet access, the availability of Microsoft Vista and eventually other functionally equivalent operating systems, and the control/interference exercised by local authorities.

¶14. (U) Begin Appendix: Websites with Significant Tibetan Language (mostly from China, although some are hosted outside of China):

<http://www.tibetnetwork.com>
<http://www.zangwangzhijia.cn>
<http://www.tibetsl.net/bbs/>
<http://www.nbyzwhzx.com/tibetan/>
<http://www.tibetanms.cn/>
http://www.yangchenlhamo.com/Tibetan/home_bo.html
<http://www.tibetabc.cn/>
<http://tibettl.com/index.html>
<http://www.tibetoo.com>
<http://www.tibetcm.com>
<http://www.tibetcm.com/tibetbbs>
<http://www.tibetcm.com/blog/index.html>
<http://www.tibetitw.com/main.html>
<http://www.tibetitw.com/bmb/>
<http://ti.tibet.cn/>
<http://www.qhtb.cn/>
<http://ti.tibet3.com/>
<http://www.tibet3.com/tibet/music/index.htm>
<http://www.tibetsl.com/>
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<http://www.tibetsl.com/tibetbbs/index.asp>

<http://www.kawajian.com/>
<http://www.kawajian.com/ls/>
<http://www.kawajian.com/shigebao/>
<http://www.kingesar.cn/tibet/>
<http://www.tonguer.net>
<http://www.xlzwjx.com/>
<http://www.cte.edu.cn/>
<http://www.hl88.com/hualong/web/index.html>
<http://www.tibetanct.com/tibetan/indexz.htm>
<http://ti.tibet.cn/shaonianbo/snb.html>
<http://www.tibetinfor.com.cn/zw/fxy/main.htm>
<http://www.arurahp.com/tibetan/index.asp>
<http://www.aruratm.com/zw/index-z.asp>
<http://www.xz.xinhuanet.com/old/zangwen/zangw enzhuye.htm>
<http://www.tibetanmd.com/tibetanweb/index.asp>
<http://www.tibetanmd.com/tibetanweb/zhuanti/i ndex.html>
<http://ti.tibet.cn/zqr/main.htm>
http://www.xznjw.gov.cn/xznjw_zw/xznjw_zw.asp
<http://ti.tibet.cn/zx/zxlist.htm>
<http://ti.tibet.cn/women/main.html>
<http://www.tibet.cn/zw/tsjj/main.htm>
<http://tibetsd.go3.icpcn.com/>
<http://www.jzschool.com/>
<http://ti.tibet.cn/slzx/main.htm>
<http://www.tibetcm.com>
<http://www.tubote.cn/>
<http://www.zmwh.org/tibetanzm/index.asp>
<http://www.tibetitw.com>
http://www.qhkpw.com/lan_z/index.php
<http://www.renpochee.com/zw/index1.htm>
<http://www.rebgongcul.com/>
<http://www.zangwangzhijia.cn/>
<http://www.tibetjx.com/tibet/index.asp>
<http://www.gdqpzhx.com/tibet/>
www.tibetyes.com
<http://www.bodbbs.com/>
<http://tibenp.com/index.htm>
<http://tibenp.com/bbs/>
<http://zw.tibetculture.net/>

<http://www.unitingtibetans.org>
<http://bo.wikipedia.org>
<http://dobum.org>
<http://kachepalu.googlepages.com/>
<http://www.xzflash.com/>
<http://dwzy.xbmu.edu.cn/zyx/tibetan/index.htm> ffice
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<http://ti.tibet.cn/zymd/main.htm>
<http://www.qhmu.edu.cn/yxdh/zxy/index.htm>
<http://211.83.241.166/zangxue/tibetan.asp>
<http://www.utibet.edu.cn/za/>
<http://www.hzmtc.edu.cn/tn/tnindex.htm>
http://www.ttmc.edu.cn/web_t/index_t.jsp
<http://tibet.wuyou.com/>
<http://www.shangshung.net/zangshou.htm>
<http://www.tibetebook.com/>
<http://www.tibetmwf.com/>
<http://trace.org/index-tib.html>
<http://www.tibetms.com/>
<http://www.deerlong.cn>

End text of appendix.
BOUGHNER